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AUTHOR Carranza, Isolda
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ABSTRACT

This study reports on preliminary findings of two research projects conducted during the 1988-89 and 1990-91 in Cordoba, Argentina, that examined fixed, idiomatic, Spanish-language expressions that are very common, but often ignored, in oral Spanish discourse. Study 1 subjects were 13 university-educated, adults, born in the city; study 2 subjects were from 3 different social sectors: a housing project, an old large lower middle-class neighborhood, and a golf country club. Twenty-five expressions were identified as pragmatic expressions and analyzed according to their ideational content, sequence structure, and speech acts and orientation towards the Gricean Conversational Maxims. Findings on "Bueno" and "Mira" are detailed. Contrary to expectations, results suggest that the highest usage is in the upper class social group. The research is ongoing with a comparison of the choice, use, and frequency with which these expressions are used in daily life. (Contains seven references.) (NAV)

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VARIATION IN CONVERSATIONAL DISCOURSE: SPANISH 'PRAGMATIC EXPRESSIONS'

Isolda Carranza.

Georgetown University.

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Introduction. This presentation is based on two research projects carried out during 1988-89 and 1990-91 in the city of Córdoba (Argentina). The object of study is fixed, idiomatic expressions which, due to their limited or null semantic content, have normally been ignored in studies of Spanish but are extremely frequent in oral discourse. They are comparable to the English 'discourse markers' studied by Schiffrin (1987), also called 'pragmatic expressions'

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(Erman 1987). Some have been analized as 'hedges' or 'interjections', and in other languages, as 'particles'. Their function is to signal specific contextual presuppositions. They are deictic because they can place a segment of text in relation to preceding and following segments, to discourse roles, and to the existing social relationship. They are signals because they trigger inferences about the text and the enunciation attitude.

Methodology. The corpus was collected for two research projects on Spanish conversational discourse in face-to-face interaction. It is restricted to conversation proper, as a type of speech event. The subjects were all adults who were born in the city of Córdoba (Argentina). Social relations among them were characterized by solidarity and familiarity. There was little social distance and a minimal or no hierarchy gap. (a) In the first research project, there were 13 subjects; all university graduates. The interactions took place in eight different encounters and the researcher had a role already defined in the social system of this set of subjects. (b) The goal in the second research project was to observe the same speech event among speakers (with the same type of social relationship) from 3 different social sectors. Access to this second set of subjects, access to the encounters, and participation in their activities was a delicate task which involved many months of fieldwork. The social groups chosen are identifiable by the community and are associated to geographical areas of the city: Group 1, with a housing estate built by the government for former residents of slums; Group 2, with an old, large, lower middle-class neighborhood whose many services make it quite independent of the downtown area; and Group 3, with the golf club. The speech situations with Group 1 took place at the site of the neighborhood cooperative which serves as a sewing workshop, also a center of lively social life. The subjects talked while they worked and the researcher had been assigned

specific tasks to help in the work. The speech situations with Group 2 were long tea breaks during ceramics and porcelain painting lessons. The students had been members of the same group for several years, and the researcher joined them for some months. The speech situations with Group 3 were fund-raising tea-parties and some meetings at the coffee bar after tennis or golf matches.

Twenty-five forms were identified as "pragmatic expressions" (PE): "bueno" (well, you see, anyway, O.K.), viste (you know, you see), "mirá" (see, look), "o sea" (that is), "ah" (oh), "qué sé yo" (whatever, anyway), "no?" (question tags), "(vos) sabés" (D'you know..?), "che" (hey, familiar vocative), "te digo" (I tell you), "lo que pasa" (what happens is), "ahora" (now), "no sabés" (you can't imagine), "(me) entendés?" (d'you understand (me)?), "te juro" (I swear), "te das cuenta?" (d'you understand?), "eh?" (eh?, o.k.?), "escuchame" (listen to this), "mirá vos" (is that right!), "y" (And), "digamos" (let's say), "después" (then), "entonces" (then), "porque" (Because), "de pronto" (say). These forms were classified according to their function in three planes of text organization: ideational content, sequence structure, and speech acts; and also according to their orientation towards the Gricean Conversational Maxims. Finally, recurrent strategic combinations of PEs in texts were identified.

Bueno. At the beginning of a new turn or within a single turn, "bueno" signals a going away from the position expressed by the immediately preceding utterance, a moving into a different position, segment, or stage. In the speech act plane, it signals that the new conversational contribution has a direct conection with the preceding one and attempts to satisfy the relevance conditions imposed by it. "Bueno" announces dispreferred responses in the following cases: (a) if the first pair-part is a question, the second pair-part marked with "bueno"

is a tentative answer. (b) if the first pair-part is an assertion, the second pair-part is a disagreement.

Group 1

A - Por qué cuarenta y cinco doña Molina?

B - Cuarenta y cinco le han cobrado. Porque le cobran un seis por ciento.

C - **Bueno** pero son boletas de ahora o son boletas de la otra vez que llegaron?

A - Why forty-five Mrs. Molina?

B - Forty-five they have charged her. Because they have charged a six per cent.

C - **Well** but they are bills for now or from the other time that bills arrived?

Group 2

A - Si yo le iba a hablar por teléfono y digo "pero mirá qué tarada le voy a hablar por teléfono para decirle que he vendido el horno" h h h ((laughs))

B - **Bueno** pero es li:ndo.

A - I was gonna call you and I say to myself "but look how silly I'm gonna call her to tell her I've sold the oven" h h h ((laughs))

B - **Well** but it's ni:ce.

Group 3

A - Ese es el cambio. Ese es el cambio que ha habido. El horario de salida.

No el de volver.

B - **Bueno** pero sabés qué le pasa? sabés que le pasa a veces, que te digo le ha pasado,

A - That is the change. That is the change that's taken place. The time they go out. Not the time they come back.

B - **Well** but you what happens to her? you know what happens to her sometimes, I tell you it has happened to her,

In addition, because it signals a change of direction in the text, it often begins self-repairs. In the plane of ideational content, "bueno" regularly appears marking the transition to a specific functional unit in narratives: the coda. In the plane of speech acts, when the first part is an offer or a suggestion, "bueno" can by itself constitute the whole turn and indicate a second pair-part: acceptance (O.K.). With "bueno" the speaker always indicates that he takes what has just preceded into consideration in order to take a new step in the interaction.

Mirá. The utterances that contain this PE typically realize an assertion. These assertions have the purpose of informing or evaluating. The change towards another sequential part, the newness of the information, or the dispreferred act is not minimized but emphasized, and the hearer is called to coincide with the position of the speaker. As part of quotes, "mirá" contributes to present vividly the reported speech because it is also addressed to the interlocutor in the real speech event. The presence of "mirá" in direct quotes is not evidence to believe that it was used in the narrated speech event, but the use of direct reported speech creates the effect

of an exact reproduction which even keeps the expressive load of the original utterance. The quoted utterance is addressed both to an interlocutor in the reported speech event and to the hearer in the real speech event.

Group 1

A - Y me dice él "Usted conoce algunas de las vecinas-" "**Mirá** al al lado precisamente vive una ( ).

A - And he tells me "D'you know some of the neighbors-" "**See** next door in fact a ( ) lives.

Group 2

A - Oi **mirá** el chico mío, el más grande, es igual que él "Papi te los van a robar y que esto que" y un día le digo "**Mirá** sobre que tu padre es tarado y vos le seguís dando manija." le digo "te voy a reventar."

A - hu **see** my son, the eldest, is just like him "Dad they're gonna steal it from you and so on and so forth" and one day I tell him "**Look** your dad has a screw loose and you keep egging him on." I tell him "I'm gonna kill you."

Group 3

A - En qué va a consistir el jueves?

B - Bueno **mirá** esto va a consistir- Esto es un torneo para recaudar fondos para el Hospital de Niños.

A - What is it gonna be on Thursday?

B - Well **see** this is gonna be- This is a tournament to raise funds for the Children's Hospital.

In addition, "mirá" can appear with rising intonation in the middle or at the end of an utterance and give it a tone of confidence and exaggeration. Those utterances always realize assertions that evaluate or inform. "Mirá" atracts the hearer to the discourse position of the speaker; that is why it is associated to exaggeration and to acts that are delicate for the speaker-hearer relation, such as expressing personal opinions or performing a dispreferred second pair-part.

The focus of the stage of research now in progress is the comparison of the choice, use, and frequency of PEs in the speech of different social sectors. The use of a large set of PEs seems to be quite uniform across social groups. However, there seem to be socially significant differences in repertoire of PEs. For example, fashion-driven expressions such as "de pronto" and "de repente" (literally, "all of the sudden", but used without this meaning, as a hedge to an assertion) are observed among young professionals and people whose speech is close to a "T.V.-talk style". Secondly, while "vió?" ("did you (V) see?") is clearly stigmatized and is used deliberately for humorous purposes, "viste?" ("did you (T) see?") is stereotypical of upper class

speech. One form that has been identified as PE, "o sea" ("that is"), seems to be associated to the working class. The protagonist of a T.V. series ("The Odd Jobs Man") was characterized by his constant use of this expression.

Social differences in frequency could be looked at having in mind Basil Berstein's distinction of two general modes of communication: restricted vs. elaborated code. Several features warrant the characterization of PEs as forms oriented to a restricted code: their predictability in a given context, their function as signals of implicit content, and the fact that they are fixed formulas whose use may be automatic (Berstein in Hymes, 1964:252). Berstein even adds that this mode of speech is characterized by 'A large number of statement/phrases which signal a requirement for the previous sequence to be reinforced "wouldn't it? You see? You know?" etc. This process is termed "sympathetic circularity".'(1964:253) Furthermore, from the point of view of discourse reception, PEs do not require as much comprehension effort as the segments with full semantic load. The hearer can prepare for or even predict the what will follow. PEs, highly frequent, fossilized forms, serve as 'background' that sets off the 'foreground', because, as Givón puts it, "A recurring experience eventually loses its perceptual saliency" (1979:346). From the point of view of discourse production and planning, the speaker can keep the state of talk while he decides how to express the next semantic and propositional content. In other words, the 'background' also has a phatic function ("keeping the channel open"). Givón (1979:349) establishes a correspondence between the pair background/foreground (in communicative terms, given/new) and Berstein's dichotomy, restricted/elaborated code.

Final Remarks. As it is well-known, Berstein considered restricted code to be the dominant speech mode of the lower working class. This would make us expect Group 1 to

produce the highest number of PEs. Our data, however, contradicts this expectation: The average number of PEs per minute is highest in the upper class group. This early finding must be confirmed by the examination of more data, but it encourages the formulation of a different sort of research questions:

(a) Given that PEs act as cohesive ties, do groups differ in the kinds of cohesion they favor? -- following Halliday & Hasan (1989), these are lexical, grammatical (e.g. conjunctions, PEs), structural (theme-rheme, given-new, parallelism), and there also seems to be a prosodic type (Nevalainen, 1992).

(b) From a more sociological perspective, given that PEs are optional elements, what does it "mean" to use them? If they are considered in their context of situation, some texts with very low lexicological density and a large number of PEs may force us to wonder about the social function of "chatter".

(c) Finally, how does the broader social context and social structure impinge upon the construction of texts by different social groups?

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